

RESTAURANTS



Photographs by LORI SIKELSON/LOS ANGELES TIMES

SLEEK DÉCOR: Silvery driftwood accents the Boa Steakhouse's distinctive dining room that includes windows facing Ocean Avenue.

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Beef is aged, but not the look

Boa in Santa Monica updates the traditional steakhouse and lets in the light.

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A steakhouse by the beach? The idea is really sick, which is to say, it's swell. Especially when the steakhouse in question has the high style and aged prime beef of Boa. The original, formerly known as Balboa, is tucked inside the Grafton Hotel on Sunset Strip. There's also a branch in Las Vegas now, so this new Santa Monica restaurant makes three.

This is not your father's steakhouse. Goodbye to dark leather booths and walls covered in wacky caricatures or vintage black-and-white ptx. Forget about giant baked potatoes and gummy cheesecake. Say hello to steaks aged 28 days on average,

Boa Steakhouse

Where: 101 Santa Monica Blvd., Santa Monica

When: Open 11:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. daily (bar and lounge until at least 1 a.m.). Full bar. Valet parking.

Cost: Appetizers, \$7 to \$15; salads, \$8 to \$12; steaks and chops, \$26 to \$39; seafood, \$27 to market price; other entrees, \$25 to \$36; sides, \$6 to \$7; desserts, \$9.

Info: (310) 899-4466

to interesting first courses and sides and, for those who don't eat red meat, to some other appealing choices.

Boa features floor-to-ceiling windows on Ocean Avenue — a steakhouse with a view! — and a radical sleek décor from Tag Front, the firm that gave the original West Hollywood steakhouse its distinctive, edgy look. Here, a grove of silvery driftwood takes center stage in the dining room.

On a Saturday night, the place is packed and our waiter is

hourse from shouting over the din. All around us, generously sized booths are filled with singles out on the town, mostly. There are guys with four or five sparsely babes apiece. Calling the waiter over with a casual gesture, they're auditioning for their own "Ocean's Twelve" screenplay.

The steak knives are seriously sharp, all the better for cutting into some of that prime aged beef. What's not to like? The Kansas City filet on the bone is marvellously flavorful — and tender. The New York strip (aged 40 days!) has a pleasantly beefy funk. Only the flatiron steak disappoints, for its flabby texture and dull taste. Over on the "composed entrees" part of the menu, thick lamb chops coated in Indonesian spices offer something exotic.

Starters include a festive chilled seafood platter. There are also a classic lettuce wedge with an excellent Point Reyes blue cheese dressing, jumbo prawns with a spanky cocktail sauce, oysters Rockefeller, and a "lobster martini," which includes blood orange, star fruit and roasted fennel.

The entrees all come à la carte, so you'll have to get busy



SURF AND TURF: Steak and a "lobster martini." Beef is aged an average of 28 days.

and order a couple of sides, like the grilled asparagus or a potato and leek gratin.

Come dessert, there's a classic New York cheesecake with a bright stain of berry sauce, Meyer lemon crème brûlée and — get this — green cotton candy.